

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 3, 2018

The Honorable Seema Verma
Administrator
Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
7500 Security Boulevard
Baltimore, MD 21244

Dear Administrator Verma:

Colorectal cancer is the third most common cancer amongst adults in the United States and the second leading cause of cancer deaths. Thankfully, with timely screening, colorectal cancer can be caught earlier when treatment is more likely to be successful, or even prevented altogether by removing precancerous lesions. For these reasons, we urge the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to use its existing authority to increase access to colorectal cancer screenings for seniors by eliminating the out-of-pocket costs associated with screening colonoscopies when a polyp is found and removed. The potential for these unexpected costs for screening colonoscopies prevent too many Medicare beneficiaries from seeking out this potentially life-saving preventive service.

It is estimated that more than 140,000 Americans will be diagnosed with colorectal cancer this year, and more than 50,000 of these Americans will die from the disease. Most instances of colorectal cancer occur in seniors, and most deaths from this cancer occur in those older than 65.

The most effective preventive action against colorectal cancer is a screening colonoscopy. This procedure allows for the early detection and removal of tissue (polyps) that could become cancerous. Current law provides preventive screenings without cost-sharing to Medicare beneficiaries, including colonoscopies. However, if a polyp is detected and removed during the screening, the procedure is subsequently billed as “diagnostic” rather than a “preventive service,” leaving the patient saddled with an unexpected bill. Medicare requires that patients pay 20 percent coinsurance for a polyp removal during a colonoscopy, which can end up costing seniors as much as \$350. This can pose a significant financial barrier for many seniors living on fixed incomes. Moreover, because it is impossible to know in advance if a polyp will be removed during a screening colonoscopy, Medicare beneficiaries do not know whether or not their screening will be fully covered until the procedure is over.

Holding Medicare beneficiaries financially responsible only if a polyp is found and removed is counter to the intent of the law and is confusing to both providers and patients. We urge you to use your existing authority to remove this unnecessary and costly coinsurance requirement.

CMS is authorized to cover screening colonoscopies that include the removal of a polyp for Medicare beneficiaries without cost-sharing under current law. The United States Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) considers screening colonoscopies a “preventive service,” and

they are included among the preventive services recommended by USPSTF. USPSTF's definition of "screening colonoscopy" is not restricted to only those without polyp removal. Regardless of whether a polyp is removed during a screening colonoscopy, the procedure should be considered a "preventive service" under the law and provided to beneficiaries without any out-of-pocket costs. Even CMS's own website indicates no cost-sharing for screening colonoscopies, with no distinction made between those that include polyp removal and those that do not. In order to remain consistent across screenings, CMS should omit the current coinsurance requirement for Medicare beneficiaries who undergo a screening colonoscopy that includes polyp removal.

Seniors should not go into a procedure worrying about whether they will be saddled with an additional cost. In fact, they may be discouraged from undergoing screening for colorectal cancer out of fear that they may have a surprise bill at the end of it. Reducing disincentives for screenings will improve health outcomes and save money for both seniors and taxpayers.

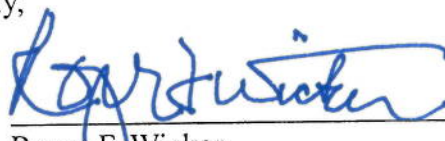
We urge you to use your authority to remove this coinsurance requirement. This would ensure that all Medicare beneficiaries are able to undergo a screening colonoscopy—and have polyps removed, if necessary—without cost-sharing. By making this sensible fix to current law, we can continue the progress our country has made in the fight against colorectal cancer.

Thank you for your consideration of this important issue.

Sincerely,



Sherrod Brown
United States Senator



Roger F. Wicker
United States Senator



Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator



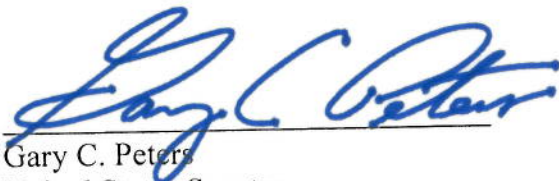
Susan Collins
United States Senator



Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator



Jack Reed
United States Senator



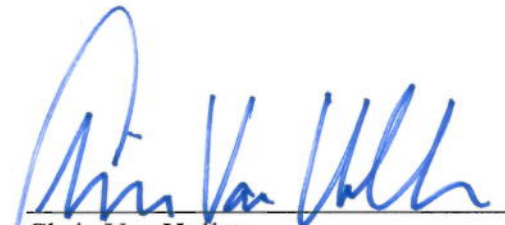
Gary C. Peters
United States Senator



Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator



Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



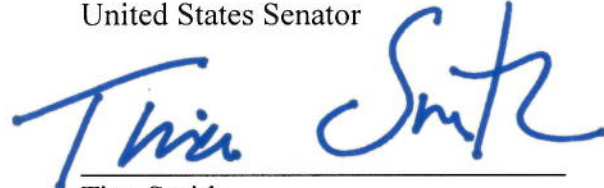
Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator



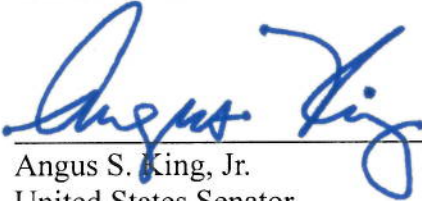
Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



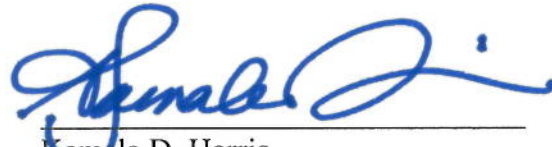
Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator



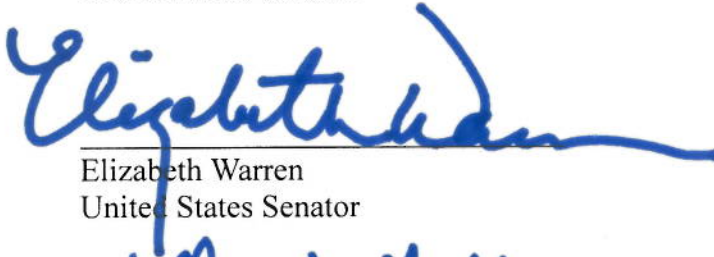
Tina Smith
United States Senator



Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator



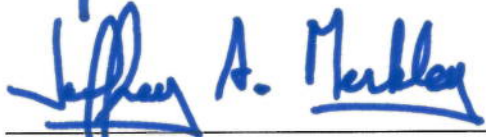
Kamala D. Harris
United States Senator



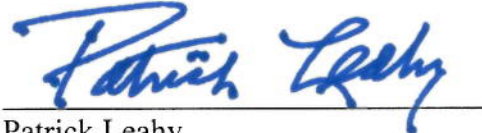
Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



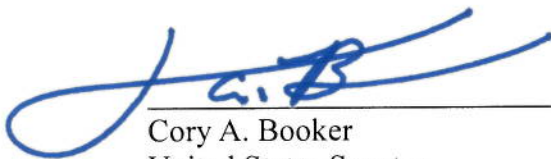
Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Patrick Leahy
United States Senator



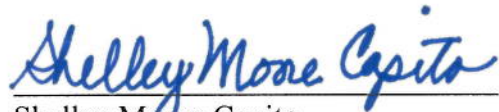
Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



Joe Donnelly
United States Senator



Dan Sullivan
United States Senator



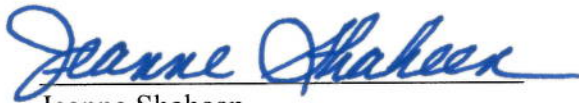
Shelley Moore Capito
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator



Robert Menendez
United States Senator



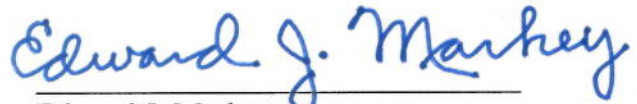
Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



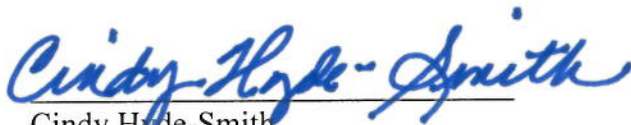
Maria Cantwell
United States Senator



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Cindy Hyde-Smith
United States Senator



Deb Fischer
United States Senator



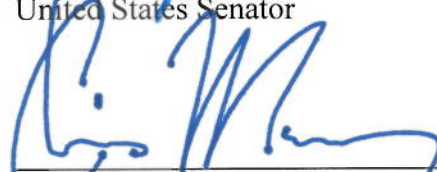
Debbie Stabenow
United States Senator



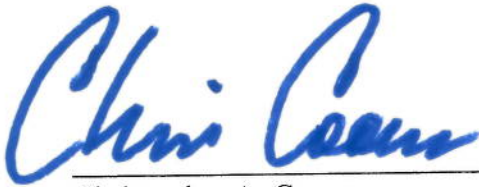
Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator



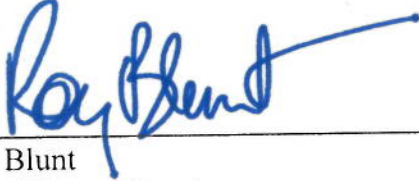
Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator



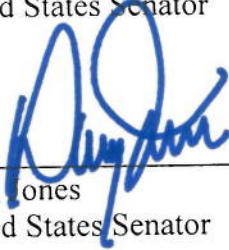
Christopher Murphy
United States Senator



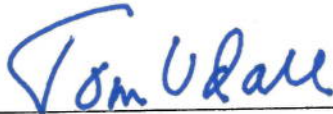
Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator




Roy Blunt
United States Senator



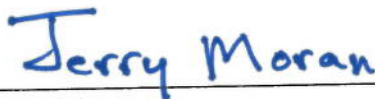
Doug Jones
United States Senator



Tom Udall
United States Senator



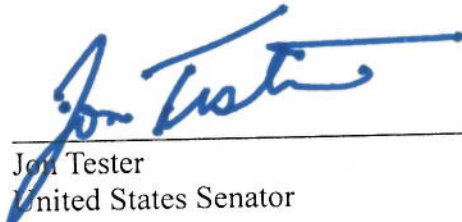
Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator



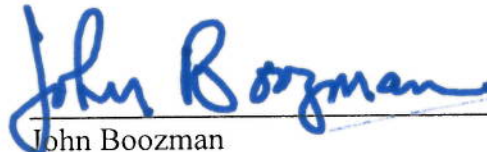
Jerry Moran
United States Senator



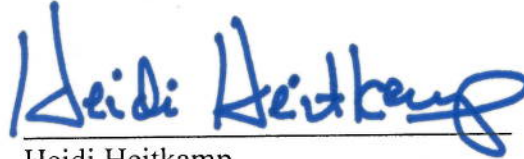
Bill Nelson
United States Senator



Jon Tester
United States Senator



John Boozman
United States Senator



Heidi Heitkamp
United States Senator



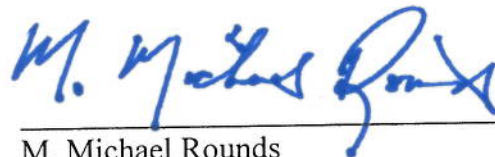
Tom Cotton
United States Senator



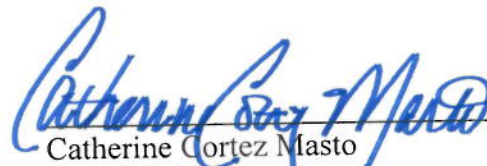
Martin Heinrich
United States Senator



Bernard Sanders
United States Senator



M. Michael Rounds
United States Senator



Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator



Lisa Murkowski
United States Senator